

Notes by Mabel Hubbard Bell, 1907, with transcript

COPIED FROM JOURNAL OF MRS. ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL OF 1905–1907
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“Notes from an old note-book of Mabel G. Bell, evidently written in fall of 1907, to clear her mind as to her objects in financing the A.E.A. Parts referring to Mr. Bell are interesting. G.H.G.”

In offering the \$20,000.00 of my own money my object was not to interfere with Mr. Bell's laboratory or his annual outlay upon it, but to give this addition and for specific purposes well defined in my own mind. The only thing not clear to me was the *modus vivendi* in which they should be carried out. I thought that the Volta Laboratory Association presented a model which might be carried out in the organization for the use of my money. This has been set aside and another arrangement suggested, to which I am perfectly willing to access if convinced that it affords the best machine for the carrying into effect the main purpose in my mind in the offering of my money as distinct from Mr. Bell's.

My main purpose was to do what I could to the furthering and bringing to completion in Mr. Bell's lifetime inventions already made by him and in many cases already brought by him to practically the condition in which his invention of the telephone existed when turned over to the Bell Telephone Association, Gardiner Greene Hubbard, Trustee. These inventions have been made during the past thirty years are recorded in Mr. Bell's note-books and are represented by apparatus, parts of apparatus models, drawings, etc., still in existence in the museums of his laboratories in Washington in Beinn Bhreagh, and of late years, by photographs. These inventions cover the greatest variety of subjects ranging from toys to instruments of utility in various very different trades and profession. As examples I have in mind. A toy phonograph made when Elsie was a baby which when spun like a top emitted distinct musical notes and I think spoken words. Mr. Bell considered that he had brought

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the invention within at least measurable distance of being 2 patentable but shrank from the idea of appearing in the Patent Office as inventor of a plaything.

This idea, has in fact had its share in deterring him from offering many of these other inventions to which I now refer for patents. Having signalized his appearance in the Patent Office as inventor of the Telephone and of the Photophone he has been unwilling to offer for patents anything less worthy. As an example of an invention capable of being an instrument of utility in a trade I would mention his device for finding levels in surveying by means of a water hose, of utility in a profession his Induction probe for the painless detection of bullets or pieces of metal in the human body. Which induction probe could be used for the discovery of metals hidden in the ground or under water. Another invention of immense practical utility requiring only minor changes and adjustments probably will within the ability of ordinary skilled electrical engineers to render immediately commercially available in his system of telephonic signals which would do away with the cumbersome and expensive switchboards now in use. This was considered by Mr. Hubbard of immense value and he was very urgent upon Mr. Bell to complete it. Had he lived it would probably have been in use in the Telephone Company these many years, but his death stopped work on it and Mr. Bell never resumed operations. He had, he said worked it out far enough to demonstrate its perfect practicability to his own mind, and he did not care to be at the bother of fussing with it further when there remained other problems to be worked out. This is fact is the attitude of his mind towards all the other inventions to which I now refer, and which soon will be his attitude towards the kites and flying machine which is now engaging his thoughts.

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And it is this attitude of his mind that is at the bottom of the purpose for which I offered my own small fortune. To take these inventions whose practicability has been demonstrated by Mr. Bell and make them practical. To take inventions made by Mr. Bell, inventions of which he and else is the inventor and prepare them for actual commercial use. I recognize that there are gaps more or less great between his inventions as they now exist and their

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by the ordinary public tradesmen and professional men, which gape require considerable and intelligent thought and experiment and the expenditure of money before they can be filled. So much time in fact must be consumed by their preparation that it is impossible that Mr. Bell or any one man could hope to see them made ready for use in his lifetime by his own efforts unaided by other trained and intelligent minds and hands.

Now of all these inventions I am especially interested just now in Mr. Bell's Tetrahedral Construction System, on which he has obtained letters patent and which is adapted for use in a variety of ways all of which require development. The use for which it was especially invented and which engages Mr. Bell's attention now is its applicability to the construction of flying machines. But it is also applicable to the construction of towers, bridges etc., of steel and iron and of various other structures of wood. I believe its possible use in these various other ways is very great, and well worthy of being developed to the benefit of the public and incidentally of course to the credit of Mr. Bell its inventor. But Mr. Bell will never probably fuss with it, certainly not alone, and I am seeking to induce someone else to take up and carry on this work of Mr. Bell's.

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This then was my idea in offering my own money. Not the production of A flying machine, but the reducing to commercial use my husband's invention of the Tetrahedral System of Construction in anyway . Its use in the manufacture of flying machines was to my mind and purpose but one of many possible ways.

My idea was that Mr. Bell should carry on his own laboratory at his expense as he has always done, the difference was that I made available means for carrying apparatus from their experimental to their practical stage. Appropriations for Mr. Baldwin's tower and for the carrying on of experiments under his directions, subject to Mr. Bell's oversight and suggestion would thus properly be made from the fund supplied by me. In the same way of course appropriations could be made for the purchase of instruments and the employment of skilled labor necessary to the working of motor engines for the flying machine.

Now why is not this as easy a way of getting over Mr. Bell's difficulty in regard to Mr. Bedwin or any other employee as well as one more agreeable to me than having my money used for the obtaining of patents? The Volta prize money was not used for the obtaining of patents and I don't want mine used for that. It seems to me that the patents should be obtained by the company to be organized by a practical business man for this purpose with capital subscribed by business men who are willing to go into it as a speculation on faith. I am willing Mr. Bell should be one of the capitalists whose money is to be used for the procuring of patents, but I want my own money used for the purpose of carrying on the experiments and the construction of the experimental apparatus leading up to the point where patents should be applied for.

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Now in the general scheme of things as they now stand, Mr. Bedwin and Mr. McNeil are provided for as is Mr. Cox. Mr. Baldwin too has been temporarily provided for in the construction of the tower, but that is nearly completed and the question comes up what to do with him. Douglas McCurdy too has had a place assigned to him as photographer and major done, but he has been educated as a mechanical engineer and these are hardly in his line as a permanence.

Then comes Lieutenant Selfridge, no very definite place has been assigned to him. Now comes Mr. Curtiss, how are we to work him in? Mr. Bell I understand has the idea of ultimately making him the business man to organize or by means of his already existing company to introduce the flying machine into commercial use. Mr. Bell's difficulty has been to provide official places for these four newcomers. I thought my money was to be used to pay for the work to be done by them. Now the attitude of my mind towards them was this, that they are specially trained graduates of scientific schools, looking beyond present salaries to future advancement in their several professions. Mr. Baldwin and Mr. McCurdy as I conceived their positions would naturally seek employment in some one of the large manufacturing concerns, where their present salaries might be very small and work hard,

but which offered advancement along their lines and permanent positions with gradually increasing salaries. We could not offer anything of that kind, but we could offer them the chance of taking hold of your work and finding at least equal opportunity for advancement and what corresponded to “gradually increasing salaries” in promising them an interest in the company or companies to be formed to work the inventions their labor had helped to make commercially available.

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To my mind therefore the problem confronting Mr. Bell is to find a suitable *modus vivendi* for the employment of these newcomers with their special qualifications, a problem which in its essence has absolutely nothing to do with Mr. Bedwin or Mr. McNeil. Mr. McNeil has men he employs independently of Mr. Bedwin, Mr. Baldwin engaged his own men, Mr. McCurdy has young McNeil as assistant, Mr. Cox works for Mr. Bell independently of all. Mr. Curtiss it is conceivable could engage his own men for work on his engine. The Lieutenant in the same way could have men assigned to him for gliding experiments. Mr. Bell made a contract with Mr. Bedwin to do certain work for him for a certain period at a certain fixed price. Mr. Bedwin himself fixed the amount and expressed himself satisfied to give his time and talents for this and no more, and therefore in equity is entitled to no more. All this talk of interest or shares in possible future companies then applies exclusively to the engagement of the newcomers, the terms on which they shall be engaged. It can be no more a matter of interest to Mr. Bedwin or Mr. Cox or Mr. McNeil than the engagement of any one else Mr. Bell and I may choose to employ for any purpose whatever. They fixed their own terms, they are working out their own contracts, they expressed themselves satisfied. Mr. Bell might have gone to Mr. Baldwin, Mr. McCurdy etc., and said I will give you so much a year, and they might have concluded an arrangement to stay a year and work for so much salary. It would in this case never have entered Mr. Bell's mind to think what Mr. McNeil or Mr. Bedwin would say or that they must receive different salaries. In short, Mr. Bell made one contract with Mr. Bedwin to work for so much annual salary. Now he is making contracts with other men to work for

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him and the 7 consideration to them is to be so much salary and so much interest, or so much share in the profits, when they acme from work on which they are to be engaged or employed by Mr. Bell. In other words while Mr. Bedwin and Mr. McNeil were engaged, Mr. Bedwin by yearly and Mr. McNeil by weekly salaries, which paid in full to their own expressed satisfaction, Mr. Bell now propose to engage other men partly by fixed annual salaries and partly by share in future profits, which profits it is understood may never materialize and which any way will not materialize without work on their part from now on. In other words again, Bedwin, McNeil, Cox and everyone else employed by Mr. Bell are working on certainties which they at the time of their engaging themselves to Mr. Bell considered full and fair value for their services. If they were to be put on the same footing as Mr. McCurdy, Mr. Baldwin etc., they would get smaller annual salaries, and have to look to the future for the balance of what they consider themselves worth. It is to be questioned whether such an arrangement would appeal to them, small present remuneration with very problemical future remuneration to be dependent on their continued work with Mr. Bell. A case in fact of a bird in hand worth two in a bush. If the choice were given them, is it by any means sure they would take it?.